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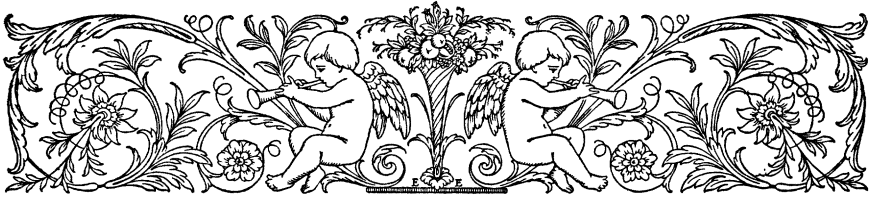
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# THE MUSICAL QUARTERLY

VOL. II.

JULY, 1916

NO. 3

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## MUSIC AS AN EXPRESSION OF RELIGIOUS FEELING

By GEORGE WHITFIELD ANDREWS

**M**USIC is a means, a vehicle. It is not an end in itself. Its harmonies, melodies, rhythms, and tonal colors have a certain charm in themselves, but if combined according to the laws inherent in these elements and after the pattern seen in the vision of the creative artist, there results an esthetic and spiritual reality which responsive souls will realize and in which they will rejoice.

Other arts have power thus to act upon the soul, but probably none so intensely and universally.

We repeat, and say, first: Music born of intelligence and imagination and fired by emotion has rare power to create emotional states; to cause an unwonted stirring of the feelings reacting upon the whole range of intellectual and spiritual capacity; second: It probably affects the emotional nature more deeply than other arts, while in universality of appeal it far surpasses them.

Accepting these characteristics of the musical art as true, its age-long service in religious worship is at once understood. What union more natural than that between the spiritual things which are "spiritually discerned" and the art whose real being must be felt, must be apprehended, rather than heard merely by the ear, or described in halting words. Marvelous as is the expressive quality of rightly chosen language, men are few who do not sometimes sing.

The Christian church has been, is, and will be, a singing church. What has the Church sung? What is the Church singing? What should the Church sing? The history of the Roman Catholic Church, of the Greek Catholic Church, of the Churches of the Protestant Reformation, including the Lutheran, and the English Episcopal, is rich in answer to the first question.

That there is a well-marked type of music in each of these divisions of the Church Universal is but a natural outcome of their different histories and ruling ideas. To ask whether one of them is more truly sacred music than another is to ask the unanswerable. Each has for centuries voiced the praises of God and been for men an expression of their deepest, unspoken prayer. Not one of these Churches but what has had, if we except the Nonconformist bodies which must be classed as recipients rather than creators, its great musicians who have done for religious worship of their day their noblest, most heartfelt work. It is from the storehouse of the fruits of their labor that the Church finds what it sings to-day in large part as truly as what it has sung in the past.

But the productions of the living have rightful claim to consideration and use if worthy. Many are of high, even highest excellence and have found their place. The esthetic and spiritual realities which are the true soul of music are unchanging, understood of all men, in all ages, in greater or lesser degree. But music has its outward dress, its different styles; and these vary and change as races vary from one another, as the ruling ideas of one age are other than those of preceding or succeeding ages. We cannot avoid being drawn toward the output of our own generation and the styles of our own day. The truths of thought and feeling common to all, understood and felt by all, are eternal. Both language and music must reincarnate them often as our race passes onward and upward in the unfolding of the plan of God. There are many embodiments of these truths so wonderful, so true, so fitting, and so sincere that the world will not let them die. We call these classic and they live because they deserve to live.

The Church sings these classics along with the songs of the present, and will do so with those of the future.

Music born of intelligence and imagination and fired by religious emotion is music that should be sung in Christian worship. Its style will, nay must vary, for to the widely differing groups of believers their songs must appear as a true and natural utterance of their own religious feeling. But it is true that the more perfectly these songs embody universal, unchanging emotional

truth the less we make account of their outward dress. Truth lies at the very foundation of Christian worship and the songs that truly voice the emotional experience of sincere souls in their religious life are fit for the use of the Church. There is something sacred, even religious about all the beauty of sound and of sight with which God has surrounded us and the presence or absence of the label "Church Music" is of little moment. If the composer was guided in his choice of tonal material by an esthetic and spiritual vision and refused to be satisfied until his work showed power to move the hearts of hearers and also for their good, then such music is fit for the Church because it is true and its influence is wholesome. It may be labelled sacred.

It would seem that musical works inspired by religious emotion, should be the greatest of all, and in proof we name Sebastian Bach in his "B minor Mass," Mendelssohn in the "Elijah," Händel in the "Messiah," Haydn in the "Creation," Mozart in the "Requiem," Beethoven in the "Ninth Symphony," with its choral conclusion, which though not religious can hardly be called anything less, and also his "Missa Solemnis." We do not usually remember that Franz Liszt wrote sacred music as well as brilliant pianoforte pieces and we do not recall any work in which his thought and feeling ring out with more of sincerity and honesty of expression than in his setting of the Thirteenth Psalm. Where has Brahms reached a higher level or seemed to speak more directly to our hearts than in his beautiful "German Requiem?" Beyond all doubt the English composers have done their worthiest work for the Church. Edward Elgar, the foremost modern figure among them has not surpassed and probably not equalled his "Dream of Gerontius" which though not intended directly for the Church is certainly inspired by religious ideas and feelings. César Franck, founder of the modern French school of composers, was first of all a devoted Catholic Christian, a church organist in Paris for many years, distinguished by his modest and loving spirit, writing music that in his best moments seems to breathe the very atmosphere of Heaven, and of him we say that his masterpiece is "The Beatitudes." In the days of Palestrina was there any nobler body of musical literature than that provided by him and his contemporaries for the Latin Church? Russian musical genius has given the world a very unique and deeply moving type of church music. Whether their contributions in other fields are greater we cannot decide, but we question whether they have shown more originality anywhere else.

Our non-liturgical churches have made but slight additions to the general stock, speaking comparatively. There have been and are musicians of ability and accomplishment in the non-liturgical churches, but there has not been the attainment of a distinct style nor the accumulation of a great wealth of material as in the case of the other religious bodies. Only a few typical names and compositions have been cited and they may stand for many other worthy names and for numberless works of splendid quality born in the heart of the Church Universal.

One cannot read the Psalms without the conviction which grows with every repetition that here is the poetic voicing of the deepest, highest, and most intense experiences possible to the soul of man. They were intended for singing, and from the day of their use in the Jewish temple until now they have been the foundation of very many of our sublimest musical productions.

It must not be overlooked that only the highest intelligence, the most vivid imagination and the deepest inspiration can bring forth works of the first order. If there is the commonplace to be found in church music its cause is to be discovered in the human agent and not in the lack of inspiring force in religious feeling.

What should church music to-day accomplish? Just what it has done in past generations: moving upon human feeling, quickening the powers of the intellect, and inclining the will to make choice. This inmost potentiality of music is not easily located, for music is nothing other than sound and movement combined according to natural and esthetic law, yet the sound and movement have no message unless the composer had a vision of truth and beauty leading him to choose certain sounds and certain movements and unite them in certain ways resulting in an utterance of blessing to him who has the ability to receive it. Is it necessary to have a critical knowledge of music in order to feel the majesty, the nobleness, the devotion, the tenderness, the sorrow and the whole range of the soul's experience which music so wonderfully voices? We are very sure that it is not. Music in the final analysis has only this to offer to the learned and skilful. Knowledge does mean more perfect insight, fuller sympathy unless, alas, it ends in the desert of pedantry and prejudice.

The conclusion then is that church music ought to be written by men of large intellectual and spiritual life, with hearts sympathetic and responsive, having the temper of the prophet who is first a beholder of visions and revelations and then an able, capable and faithful agent in conveying them to men for their

edification. Thousands of pages of church music have been written by just such men. The flood-tide of musical genius is not permitted to every generation, but the Church has perhaps always had its inspired musical prophets writing in the spirit of our ideal. But it is not enough to be sympathetic, and inspired by religious feeling. Musical law must be known and obeyed if perfect and permanent worth is to result. We see always two classes of mind about us; one intuitive, the other reasoning, one somewhat impatient of painstaking study and careful preparation, the other often inclined to think too lightly of imagination and of insight. There are musicians whose training is incomplete and faulty and who are not as ready to work hard as they should be, while there are others who stake everything upon labor and system. In the case of the one superficiality; in the case of the other dullness.

Let every man and musician sharpen his tools, but let him not be mastered by them.

But the whole duty is not the musician's. The Church has an equal obligation. Is the Church requiring of her musical servants the very best they can give? Is there no danger that they will be asked to cater merely to the passing fancy regardless of the real quality of that which thus pleases. Pleasure is certainly not the important end of public worship, even if it may be in the better sense a permissible accompaniment. Preaching is for the warning, the enlightenment, the upbuilding, of hearers, and music has absolutely no place in the Christian church unless it can in some way enforce the message of the minister. Ages of religious history prove that it can do so. It does to-day, when rightly used, just as always in the past it has done.

Periods of decadence in the quality and use of music in the Church, such as have many times occurred, must be ascribed to a public demand for something below the best that could have been given, or that the people should have asked to receive.

It cannot be asked that the whole world should receive and profit by the same type of religious music. This is not yet possible though it may be when all Christian men are true brothers in the universe of God, rather than members of a race and class. But that will mean an all inclusive type embracing the riches of all time and understood by all because of its inherent spirit and not on account of its outward dress.

For the present we may ask that every church be honest in its purpose to make its musical services directly contributory to the spiritual work with which it is charged. The Church is not

a club. Its object is not entertainment. The minister "seeks to persuade men" and the music must do likewise. The minister seeks to move men by the proclamation of the truth of God. Good music also speaks the truth of God to human hearts and enforces its message with an intensity peculiar to itself. The Church is doing its duty towards its musical servants when it makes plain to them that their obligation is met in "seeking to persuade men" through the power of their art; when it asks not to be entertained primarily, and when it receives with appreciation and sympathy that which is honestly offered. No musician can do work of an high order when more or less conscious of being expected to give only passing pleasure or to "show off." No one can work well with or for the unresponsive and coldly critical. Beautiful plants do not grow in such soil.

It is remarkable how much the spirit in men has to do with their understanding of and pleasure in each other's work. It is more fundamental than knowledge, which is apt to be divisive. I should be confident of better appreciation from an audience of earnest-minded, loving Christian people with but little acquaintance and knowledge in the world of good music, than from those of more intelligence and colder hearts. "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth." There is a divine insight and quickness of perception in a true Christian heart which brings a degree of sympathetic understanding even where intelligence and taste are in a measure lacking. Good church music will be more at home and will advance more rapidly in the atmosphere of love without knowledge than in that of knowledge without love. When the love of God fills men's hearts they are drawn out naturally toward all the world of beauty, He has provided. They may not understand good music and may fear the word "classic," but if the deeper and truer spiritual meaning is really in the music they will find it in constantly increasing measure, providing only that the interpretative artist has himself found it first of all. The impulse towards perfection of character, of taste, and of knowledge is one of the first fruits of a vital faith and there is not much danger that a living church will fail to seek the best in music.

The question at once arises: What is best? In the first place that which has endured the severest tests, the test of time and wide use. In the second place that which seems most perfectly to serve the needs and voice the religious feelings of any group of people in their day, under their circumstances, and with their tasks to perform. It seems to me that it should not be such as to fail to command the respect of the intellect. On the other

hand it is worthless if it does no more than win a cold regard. I do not wish to feel less respect for the way I treat the mind, God has given me, when dealing with music than when engaged in any other intellectual operation. I would not withhold the simpler music from men, but I would ask them to be open-minded towards other forms of music which at first they might not understand. Good music heard, becoming familiar will make its own way. We need not, should not deprive ourselves of the benefit of the greater works of men because at first we do not grasp them. Anything unfamiliar is in a sense unfriendly, but let us be patient and become acquainted. If good music is heard often enough in a receptive mood it will explain itself better than a critical treatise can do. We think that any good music, sympathetically performed by one whose skill and understanding are adequate and whose one purpose is to bring a benefit to his hearers, will demonstrate its power. We cannot undertake to decide in a dogmatic way what music a church should sing. We have laid down certain principles which seem to us sound, and we may add that the best and noblest is in place nowhere if not in the house of God. I am not sure that we are always perfectly devoted to the best in our intellectual life in fields other than the musical. Is it possible that those who ought to do better are being taken with rather cheap and crude things? I do not think that the true charity which is some day to rule this world is leading thitherward. We must meet men musically as in other things where we find them. It is not necessary nor honest to remain there always.

It is difficult to feel that musicians who are not earnest Christian men and women are in place in Christian worship as helpers of the minister and we are sure that they have no other rightful office in the Church. If the musician is blind, unresponsive to, and unmoved by the truth the minister is speaking, he is in no position to enforce his message. He needs to feel the moving and inspiring power of the truth if he is to do his part worthily.

How often have the musicians been touched and moved in the deepest way by a strong, true sermon, and in turn the minister roused to speak with new warmth through the effect of some splendid piece of work done by his choir. We know that this happy condition of things is not uncommon in our land and we expect it to become universal. Minister and musician are to lean upon each other for the most sincere help in an end that is absolutely one in its purpose and aim. Each contributes his own absolute best; each strives and prays for the same divine result.



Between minister and musician first of all, the sympathetic understanding and considerate appreciation, after which some knowledge of each other's problems, field of work, etc., is of value. A little reading in Musical History and Appreciation would be helpful to the minister, and the musician who knows what has passed, and is passing in the world of Christian thought and activity will find his heart made warm for his task as no mere musical inspiration can insure.

It seems to me that merely to make music in church, unsympathetic towards the Church's great endeavor in the world, is to do a thankless thing and one of comparative fruitlessness. Given this right relation to the Church and its great work I should urge all the knowledge and skill for the church musician that is possible of attainment. Musical talent is very widely bestowed and there are few churches but what may find not a small number among their young people, fitted by their gifts for a splendid service as musicians. Let the proper opportunity for training be given these young people and the Church will be made glad by the service they will render. There is no conceivable artistic endeavor demanding more of ability, knowledge and consecration.